

# FACTSHEET

## *Plant Protection & Quarantine*

United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Animal and  
Plant Health  
Inspection  
Service

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## Importing Cut Flowers

### Cut Flower Importation and Inspection

A dozen red roses for that special someone or an arrangement of carnations for an overworked secretary are common requests at local florist shops in the United States. However, most Americans do not realize the long journey those flowers have taken from Colombia or the Netherlands or some other foreign country—along with the careful measures that the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) has taken to ensure the flowers are free of pests and diseases.

Each year APHIS officers inspect millions of boxes of cut flowers brought into this country. That's because some of these flowers may carry hitchhiking pests and diseases that are foreign to the United States and could cause great harm to the Nation's flower industry. One of the most serious diseases that can be introduced on imported flowers is *Chrysanthemum* white rust. If established in the United States, the disease could decimate the U.S. chrysanthemum industry.

### APHIS' Role in Flower Importation

APHIS Plant Protection and Quarantine (PPQ) officers also work cooperatively with importers and rely on them to provide the proper documents for each of their flower shipments. Only four genera and one separate species of flowers are required to have written permits issued by APHIS to enter the United States: *Rhododendron* (includes azaleas), *Camellia*, *Gardenia*, and *Rosa* (roses), plus *Syringa vulgaris* (lilac). In these cases, an importer must apply for an agricultural import permit from the PPQ Permit Unit. This unit advises importers on import restrictions and requirements and provides importers with information (including regulations, policies, and procedures) on cut flowers they wish to import into the United States. For instance, if an importer wants to bring in a shipment of flowers from the Netherlands, PPQ officers provide the importer with U.S. import requirements in advance.

Importers must obtain phytosanitary certificates from the exporting country to accompany the import permits. These certificates verify that the quarantine officials of the exporting country have examined the flowers prior to their leaving the country and found them to be pest and disease free. The certificates also identify the flowers by their scientific names and confirm that the shipment meets U.S. regulations for importation.

PPQ officers ensure that all shipments of imported cut flowers reach local florists free of pests and diseases by enforcing quarantine laws that require cargo to be inspected at the first U.S. port of arrival. Any shipment or portion of a shipment may be refused or be required to be treated if PPQ officers find pests of quarantine significance.

When PPQ officers discover a pest or disease, they take a sample and complete an interception form, which describes what they have found and identified. PPQ officers refer all pests and insects to the staff entomologist for confirmation. If the entomologist determines that an insect or pest is "actionable"—meaning that it is not known in the United States or it exists in limited distribution—the flowers are either fumigated, sent back to the country of origin, or destroyed.

If the importer chooses fumigation, treatments are performed at the risk of and expense to the importer and must be performed under the supervision of an APHIS officer. After fumigation, the officer releases the flowers to the importer and allows them to enter the country. If the entomologist determines that the insect or pest is not harmful and poses no economic threat to U.S. agriculture, the officer releases the flowers to the importer.

### Ports of Miami, FL, and New York, NY

John F. Kennedy International Airport (JFKIA) and Miami International Airport (MIA) receive the largest volume of international cargo imported through U.S. airports. MIA is tops for flowers, with more than 11 million boxes carrying 342,000 tons of flowers passing through the airport annually. This represents two-thirds of our country's \$13 billion in annual retail sales of cut flowers. USDA's Miami PPQ officers clear 10 million to 20 million stems of

flowers shipped daily through MIA for entry into the United States.

It is hard to imagine what these numbers look like during peak periods like Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, Secretary's Day, and Christmas, when flower imports can rise by as much as 50 percent.

The cut-flower inspection operation at MIA is the largest in the world. The dollar volume of cut flowers imported into Miami from 1994 to 1995 was \$675 million. Miami's 95 PPQ officers are among the 5,400 employees supporting the local fresh cut-flower import industry, which includes importers, bouquet companies, brokers, and related transportation companies.

Most of the flowers that are imported via the port of Miami come from South America, primarily Colombia. If a flower carrying a foreign plant pest or disease were accidentally introduced into the State, Florida's \$6 billion agricultural industry would be at serious risk. PPQ officers in Miami ensure that this risk remains minimal.

While MIA handles high volumes of only a few kinds of flowers, such as roses and baby's breath, New York's JFKIA sees a wide variety of flowers but in much smaller numbers. "Only" 21,780 tons of cut flowers pass through JFKIA yearly. But in February 1996, 80,000 boxes of flowers from 25 different countries were shipped through JFKIA. PPQ officers can inspect 40 to 50 different types of flowers in a single shipment.

The northeastern region of the United States is the gateway for the Netherlands' flower industry. Most of the flowers that pass through JFKIA are from the Netherlands, especially tulips in the springtime. Israel, South Africa, Thailand, Australia, and New Zealand also transport flowers through JFKIA. A crew of about 30 PPQ officers completes most of the inspections between 10 p.m. and 2 a.m., so the flowers can be cleared and sent to flower vendors by 6 a.m. About half of the flowers that come through JFKIA go straight to New York City; the rest get distributed throughout the Northeast.

## **Help Keep Pests and Diseases Out**

Whether the flowers are propagated orchids from Thailand or a load of philodendrons from Central America, USDA encourages importers to follow the proper procedures for importing plants and plant products.

U.S. importers should plan ahead and secure their agricultural import permits for their shipments far in advance of their transport. For more information or for import permits, contact

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